

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

THE LESSER GOLDEN PLOVER IN KENYA The Siberian race *fulva* of the Lesser Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* breeds in the arctic circle from eastern Siberia to Alaska, and winters mainly from Hawaii and Japan south to Indo-China, Malaya, eastern India, Ceylon, Australia and the west coast of New Zealand (Vaurie 1965). It is a great wanderer however, which has reached Europe, Greenland and northeast U.S.A. (Vaurie 1965). In Africa, it occurs in small numbers, but probably regularly, in the northeast, on the Sudan coast and in Eritrea (Moreau 1972, Smith 1972). It is rare in inland Ethiopia (Urban & Brown 1971) and only twice recorded in Somalia (Archer & Godman 1937). South of Kenya it has occurred as a vagrant, mainly between October and January, in Tanzania (two records), Zambia (four records), and South Africa (four records), while Feare & High (1977) recorded it from the Seychelles.

Backhurst, Britton & Mann (1973) gave only two records for Kenya, both from the coast: single birds near Mombasa at the end of 1961 and at Malindi from late December to early January, 1969/70. There have since been six more published occurrences:

- 1 Lake Nakuru, 15 October 1972 (EANHS OS-C 1977)
- 2 Aruba, Tsavo East, 5 January 1976 (EANHS OS-C 1977)
- 1 Malindi Golf Course, 26 September - 20 October 1976 (EA Bird Report 1977)
- 1 Surgoit Dam, Eldoret, 9 October 1976 (EA Bird Report 1977)
- 1 Ferguson's Gulf, Lake Turkana, 25 December 1976 (EA Bird Report 1977)
- 1 between Malindi and the Sabaki River mouth, 16-18 April 1977 (EA Bird Report 1977)

In addition, a 'probable' was reported by O. Ashford (*in litt.*) from north of Malindi, 16 April 1975. Thus, recently, occurrences have become almost annual, divided about equally between the coast (especially the Malindi area) and inland. Since this is clearly a species to be looked out for, a brief review of field characters seems appropriate.

Most bird guides give the impression that *dominica* would be difficult to distinguish from the Golden Plover *P. apricaria*, the principal difference being the colour of the axillaries, grey in *dominica*, white in *apricaria*. This feature is, in fact, readily visible, provided a lateral or overhead view is obtained of the bird in flight. However, *dominica* is much more distinctive than this, being smaller and lighter in build and altogether darker than *apricaria*. Various observers, for example Harvey (1973), have commented on a superficial resemblance to a Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, probably the result of a combination of rather long neck, small head and slender bill. The spring 1977 Malindi bird had a conspicuous creamy supercilium, a narrow white tip to the tail and a pale wing-bar formed by greyish primary bases, features not normally stressed with respect to *apricaria*. The call of *dominica*, a distinctive whistle, usually given as *tu-ee* or *su-eet*, with a questioning rise on the second syllable, is quite different from the liquid piping *tlui* of *apricaria*. Pearson (*in* EANHS OS-C 1977) refers also to the strong wing-beats of *dominica* as compared with *apricaria*.

In Kenya, an example of *P. dominica* seen on the shore can easily be distinguished from the smaller sand plovers *Charadrius* spp., none of which is mottled with black above. It is unlikely to be mistaken for the

larger Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* which has a white wing-bar and rump, black axillaries and a quite different call. Inland, confusion may be possible with the Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*, however, the Caspian normally occurs in parties in plains country, and has uniform brown upperparts, a brownish wash across the breast, with some vague mottling but no streaking, and a narrow white wing-bar. In breeding plumage, *dominica* has a black face and underparts, and black and gold spangled upperparts, quite different from any plover species occurring in East Africa.

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A SECOND RECORD OF DICKINSON'S KESTREL IN SOUTHERN KENYA *Falco dickinsoni* was first recorded in Kenya by Horwitz & Anderson (1976) who photographed an individual at Amboseli on 30 June 1975. On the afternoon of 23 June 1978, at Salt Lick Lodge near the Taita Hills, one of my companions, Dr Christopher Parrish, reported seeing a small grey kestrel with pale head and rump. I did not locate the bird that day, but shortly after sunrise on the following morning I discovered an adult-plumaged Dickinson's Kestrel perched conspicuously in a dead tree about 65 m from my vantage point at the lodge. Viewing the bird through a 20X spotting 'scope at intervals for about 5 min, Dr Parrish, Marian Zimmerman and I noted the prominent pale head, grey or black bill with bright yellow cere, very conspicuous yellow orbital ring (almost connecting with the cere), light grey underparts (somewhat darker posteriorly), and seven or eight narrow dark bands on the underside of the grey tail - the more distal bands somewhat wider than the basal ones. In flight, observed through 10X binoculars, the bird's rump and upper tail-coverts were noticeably pale, appearing almost white in contrast with the very dark grey mantle and upper tail surface. The falcon's small size was evident as several Superb